

REMARKS

Claims 3 - 6 and 9 are in the application.

As a result of the foregoing amendment, claims 3 and 4 have been written in independent form. Claims 1, 2, 7 and 8 have been cancelled.

As required in the Office Action, an abstract on a separate sheet is attached hereto.

With respect to the objection to the disclosure, the Examiner will note that the reference to claim 1 has been deleted from page 3.

Also, the Examiner will note that the specification has been provided with appropriate headings.

Concerning the drawings, submitted herewith is a copy of Figure 1 with a proposed drawing correction. Specifically, Figure 1 has been labelled as --prior art---.

Concerning the rejection of the claims under 35 U.S.C. 112, second paragraph, the claims have been amended to make it clear that the immersion temperature refers to the

temperature of the strip.

In view of the Examiner's indication that claims 4 - 5 would be allowable if rewritten in independent form, it is submitted that claims 4, 5 and 9 are in condition for allowance.

With respect to claim 3, it is respectfully submitted that the references applied by the Examiner in rejecting claim 3 do not disclose or suggest carrying out all of the method steps between the last rinsing stage of the rinsing station through the drying station up to the inlet of the furnace hermetically screened from ambient oxygen from the surroundings. The reference to Ackermann relied on by the Examiner as showing the feature of original claim 3 only suggests making the inlet and outlet gas tight.

Accordingly, it is respectfully submitted that the claims presently in the application are allowable over the art of record.

Therefore, in view of the foregoing, it is submitted that this application is now in condition for allowance and such allowance is respectfully solicited.

Any additional fees or charges required at this time in connection with the application may be charged to Patent and Trademark Office Deposit Account No. 11-1835.



Respectfully submitted,
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CERTIFICATE OF MAILING

I hereby certify that this correspondence is being deposited with the United States Postal Service as first class mail in an envelope addressed to: Assistant Commissioner for Patents, Washington, D.C. 20231, on September 12, 2003.

By: F K K
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Date: September 12, 2003